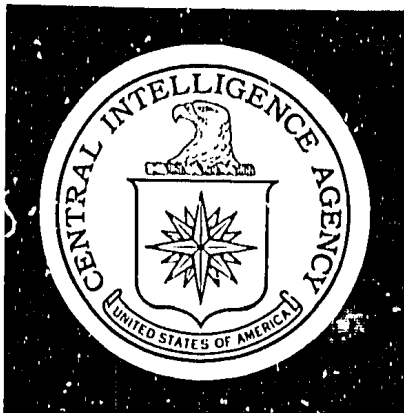


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OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

*British Arms for Vorster: The Likely Repercussions
In Black Africa*

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5 January 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 January 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: British Arms for Vorster: The Likely Repercussions
in Black Africa*

NOTE

In mid-July the Heath government announced a relaxation in the UK's arms embargo against South Africa to permit the sale of marine defense equipment. Although the British declared their continued opposition to apartheid and their intention to maintain a ban on arms for use against guerrillas, the new policy has aroused strong protest in Black Africa, where it is considered a serious setback in the campaign to isolate and weaken the White minority regimes in the south, and probably an indication of further trends in Western policy unfavorable to Black Africa. The subject will be raised at the forthcoming Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference

* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates. It was discussed with representatives of the Office of Current Intelligence and the Office of Economic Research who are in general agreement with its judgments.

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scheduled for 14-22 January. This paper discusses the likely consequences of renewed British arms sales in the context of the southern Africa problem as a whole, and assesses the likely immediate impact on Black African policies toward the UK and the possible long-term effects on relations between Black Africa and the West generally.

* * * * *

The UK and its Black Ex-Colonies: Limited Involvement

1. The British consolidated control over most of their Black African territories in the early 1900s, toward the twilight of the Empire, and never were able to decide quite how to treat them. British settlement in these areas remained small -- even by 1953 Kenya, one of the favored areas for British settlers, had only 30,000, many of whom had come in after World War II. Nor did Black Africa ever have large numbers of British administrators. In the 1920s, for example, 400 British civilian officials administered Nigeria: a populous area four times the size of the British Isles. Most of the British citizenry, and many of those influential in

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government remained uninformed about these areas, and this unfamiliarity led to an uncertain and fluctuating policy, the only recurrent theme of which was a vague notion that it would be desirable to have a White-controlled dominion as an anchor of stability somewhere in Black Africa.

2. It was therefore not surprising that, when the UK decided to pull out of Black Africa, the break was relatively complete. Unlike the French, who arranged to leave intact a web of dependent financial, commercial, and other relationships in their former Black African colonies, the British provided only minimal alimony: modest foreign aid, a handful of specialists to advise the new governments, and certain trade preferences in the UK market. No effective steps were taken to strengthen the Commonwealth, which remains a loose organization of independent member states. Its chief benefit lies in its subsidiary educational, scientific, and other organs -- e.g., a Commonwealth locust control service -- and not in political cohesion, which is marked by its absence.

The Southern Africa Question and the Shift in British Policy

3. Although the British withdrawal was virtually complete, the UK has until now been one of Black Africa's most

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important sources of international support on the so-called southern Africa question. Indeed, the only meaningful support Black Africa has had on this issue -- even though it has not satisfied the more militant African regimes -- has come from the UK and the US, through their enforcement of comprehensive sanctions against Rhodesia and an arms embargo against South Africa. This issue -- what to do about the White minority Bastions in the south -- is an emotionally-charged question among Black African states. For most of them the problem has been like sinus trouble: they are constantly annoyed by it, it will be with them indefinitely, and there is little they can do to relieve it; yet it seldom keeps them from getting on with matters of more immediate concern. The Black nations have accordingly brought pressure to bear on industrial Western countries -- particularly the UK and the US -- to take action against the White minority regimes.

4. Until very recently the British, like the US, have given strict interpretation to the ban on selling arms "which could be used to support apartheid". Almost no US or British weapons have been sold to the South Africans since the UN Security Council resolution of 1963. France, while publicly

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agreeing to such a prohibition, has in fact given it so loose an interpretation as to make it meaningless. French weapons exports to South Africa quickly grew to an estimated level of at least \$90-100 million annually, and have included Mirage jets, Alouette helicopters, and the licensing of production locally of the Panhard armored car.

5. The Heath government's announcement of its intention to relax the ban marks a clear and major shift in British policy. In a post-election speech, Alec Douglas-Home, the new Foreign Secretary, argued that the Cape route is vital to British interests, and that a growing Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is a potential threat to this route. To counter this, he urged a "renewal" of the Simonstown Agreement, under which the UK would supply frigates and reconnaissance planes to South Africa in return for Royal Naval access to the Simonstown base. Accordingly, in mid-July the UK announced that it was "prepared to consider applications" for the sale of maritime defense equipment "directly related" to the security of sea routes.

6. The kind of arms to be offered under Britain's new policy should not, in fact, do much to enhance South Africa's

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anti-guerrilla capability; but the shift demonstrates, for all to see, an effort to renew UK-South African military cooperation and thus, a symbol of British willingness to accept South Africa's apartheid regime. On these grounds, it has aroused a storm of protest in Great Britain. Foreign Office and Defence officials are reported to be "almost unanimous" in their opposition -- the latter because they question the gravity of the Soviet "threat" and, in any case, fail to see how it could be effectively neutralized by strengthening the South African navy; the former because they are concerned that resumption of arms sales may bring a serious crisis to British relations with the Commonwealth.

7. Harold Wilson has announced that any arms agreement of this kind which may be reached will be immediately repudiated by a Labour Government. Even the Tories are far from unanimous in accepting Sir Alec's assessment, but Mr. Heath has so far shown no intention of backing away from it. Indeed, as opposition to a resumption of arms sales has been voiced within the UK and has risen to a shrill pitch among Black African members of the Commonwealth, it appears that Mr. Heath's commitment to such sales has become a deep and perhaps immutable conviction. It seems to be, in fact, far less a reflection of his

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concern with the Indian Ocean than of his resolve to act according to his conception of Great Britain's own economic and political interests; and Mr. Heath apparently sees these as lying more with South Africa than with Black Africa. Formally, however, the government has announced no final decision, and has undertaken to consult other Commonwealth countries before doing so. Some consultations have been going on since the early autumn, and a decision is expected to be announced early in 1971 -- perhaps following the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting scheduled for 14-22 January.

8. The South African government, which would prefer to avoid the spotlight of worldwide publicity on its arms trade, responded cautiously to the UK's initiative. In late July -- a few days after the British policy statement -- the Vorster regime asked Whitehall for a clarification of the Simonstown Agreement. Presumably the South Africans would like some sort of annex or revision to the old agreement which would ensure that the flow of arms would not dry up with a change in government in the UK. By mid-October South Africa had sent the British a tentative shopping list, which seemed tailored to meet the Douglas-Home "external threat only" criterion: corvettes, WASP helicopters, NIMROD reconnaissance planes, and BUCCANEER strike aircraft.

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The Immediate Impact on Black Africa: Sound and Fury

9. It seems probable at this writing that the UK will decide to go ahead with arms sales to the South Africans. (We assume, in the following commentary that that will be the case.) The immediate response in Black Africa is not difficult to predict; it will be almost a matter of reflex, and it will be extremely noisy and histrionic. A considerable number of Black leaders will deliver sweeping denunciations of the UK, imperialism, Western intrigue, etc. Such harangues will be virtually an obligation, particularly for leaders of major states, like Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, and for men like Touré and Kaunda who claim, on occasion, to speak for all of Black Africa. These leaders will intensify their efforts at the UN to gain support for their campaign against the White minority regimes and to have the UK's action condemned.

10. Indeed at least two heads of state -- Kaunda and Nyerere, leaders of intensely African nationalist regimes in Zambia and Tanzania -- are personally and publicly committed to bringing an end to White minority rule in the south. Moreover they have permitted various national liberation groups

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to use Zambian and Tanzanian territory as a refuge and staging area for operations against neighboring White-run states. This policy has made both leaders acutely sensitive to their neighbors' military potential, particularly since the Portuguese have been increasingly inclined to take punitive action across their borders. Zambia and Tanzania will take the issue to the OAU, which will oblige them with a stinging denunciation of Britain's action and perhaps with a couple of toothless resolutions in favor of boycotting British goods and intensifying aid to the African liberation movements. It is possible that nothing more will happen; that in the six months or so since the British announcement, the Black leaders already have pretty well drained their reservoirs of emotion and exhortation on this subject.

11. It is more likely, however, that there will be further repercussions. Both Obote of Uganda and Nyerere have stated publicly that they will take their states out of the Commonwealth, albeit with some misgivings; and Kaunda is seriously considering the same response. Kaunda also is likely to cancel his long-pending order for Rapier missiles, worth an estimated \$15-20 million, and will look about for a few British enterprises to take over, although his recent

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nationalization decrees have already used up most of his leverage in this direction. He might also take measures to cut Zambia's imports from the UK, which run around \$125 million annually. If the UK is sufficiently maladroit in handling its decision, Nyerere and Obote might well carry a few more Black countries with them out of the Commonwealth. A likely possibility is Kenya, which might be pressured into following the lead of its more radical East African neighbors. Guyana* -- though an ocean away -- and Sierra Leone also have threatened to leave, but these countries are somewhat farther removed from the southern Africa issue -- in terms both of geography and political priorities.

12. The exodus of a few Black African countries from the Commonwealth would probably be of no more than symbolic significance. The UK's bilateral economic ties with ex-members would in all likelihood be little affected, if at all. Even if some of the departing Black countries were to adopt economic measures against the UK, they would not seriously affect the

* Guyana's interest in the "southern Africa question" first surfaced at last fall's Non-Aligned Conference, where Prime Minister Burnham was the most outspoken champion of the African liberation movements.

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British economy. Nor would the threat of an end to British foreign aid be sufficient to deter any of these countries from leaving the Commonwealth. Currently Uganda gets about \$10 million a year in British development aid, while Kenya and Zambia each receive less than half that sum and Tanzania even less.

13. The British decision to sell arms to the South Africans thus is unlikely to produce an immediate general crisis in Anglo-Black African relations, in the sense of the Black states severing diplomatic ties and taking direct reprisals against UK trade, business interests, and citizens. For the Black Africans, however, the UK's move seems to be part of an adverse long-term trend. They see it as the start of what seems likely to become a durable and expanding military cooperation between the UK and South Africa. Many will argue that it bestows tacit acceptance on the apartheid regime as it is. The Black African leaders have good grounds for viewing the UK decision as the first stage of a planned disengagement from its heretofore consistent stand against the White minority regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia. Recently, for example, British officials have suggested that the UK will not renew sanctions

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against Rhodesia when they expire late in 1971. If the British take this step it, too will provoke strong condemnation from Black Africa.

14. Moreover the UK decision on arms comes at a particularly sensitive time. The member states of the OAU, many of which have been giving financial and other support to the various Black African liberation groups, have only within the past year come to acknowledge the abysmal failure* of the national liberation movement. They also see the White Bastions growing stronger in the face of sanctions which have been in force several years, and which are now being gradually chipped away. They realize that there is virtually no chance now of persuading the Western industrial nations to strengthen the current measures; indeed, the trend is clearly in the reverse direction. Even the Black regimes most actively pursuing a policy of confrontation against their White neighbors have come to realize the ineffectiveness of this policy. and the dangers inherent in it. This has been made particularly clear by the

* Only the insurgency in Portuguese Guinea is showing any signs of making progress.

White minority states' capability and readiness to undertake sudden punitive raids into Black nations which offer sanctuary to Black guerrillas. The November raid on Guinea has evoked loud cries of anguish in Zambia and Tanzania, both of which anticipate future operations of this kind to be directed against them.

15. In the face of these bleak realities a number of Black regimes have been reappraising and, in some cases, gradually modifying their policies vis-a-vis the southern Africa question. This tendency has been reinforced by the Black African states' spectacular failure to find a common strategy. The closest they came was the issuance in late 1969 of the so-called Lusaka Manifesto, in which the White minority regimes were offered an end to guerrilla activity if they would initiate steps toward majority -- i.e., Black -- rule; but only 13 of more than 30 Black African states signed the Manifesto. During 1970 disarray over the southern Africa issue rapidly intensified. Vorster, himself stimulated this process by pursuing his "outward" policy, based essentially on offers of economic and technical aid to Black countries and an agreement on reciprocal "non-interference" -- i.e., no compromise on apartheid. In November Ivorian leader

Houphouet-Boigny seized the initiative by proposing a Black African summit to devise a common basis for conducting dialogue with the Vorster government. His proposal exposed deep divisions on this issue within Black Africa. While several countries expressed qualified approval, by far the predominant reaction was negative. In Ghana Prime Minister Busia's cautious statement that the possibility of dialogue should not be excluded evoked a strongly-worded repudiation by the parliamentary opposition.

16. The UK's decision to loosen its arms embargo is thus one of several recent developments having the same general consequence for the Black Africans: a worsening of the terms of their struggle to isolate and hurt the White minority regimes. Several African leaders and a broad spectrum of the African press have interpreted the decision as a hostile act against Black Africa and have called for reprisals against the British. Nor have other Western countries escaped tarring by the same, often indiscriminate brush. Black African officials have suggested that pressure could be brought on Portugal by its powerful NATO allies; and the failure to do so is considered by the more militant Black regimes as tacit support of Portuguese colonial policy. The occasional discovery of British

land mines or other souvenirs of NATO-member manufacture following Portuguese raids in Zambia or Tanzania has done little to dispel this view. At the Non-Aligned Conference in September the Black African-sponsored resolution on southern Africa condemned the US, France, the UK, Germany, Italy, and Japan for their "political, military, and economic collaboration" with the Vorster regime.*

17. What consequences, then, is the Heath government's decision likely to have? Clearly it will contribute to worsening UK relations with Black Africa -- particularly with the handful of states for whom the southern Africa problem is of major interest. In itself the decision may well have no further discernible impact in Black Africa. Together with other major

* The French, however, have been more adroit than the British in escaping criticism. When Kaunda and Nyerere separately visited London in October to present the case against arms sales, Heath treated them to a strident, table-thumping lecture on interfering in British affairs. Pompidou -- whose government has provided the South Africans with 75 helicopters and a license to manufacture armored cars -- listened attentively to the Black leaders, who "persuaded" him to ban the further sale of these articles: a gesture which cost France little, inasmuch as South Africa does not need further supplies of either item from France.

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setbacks to Black Africa's position vis-a-vis the White minority states, however, the new British policy is contributing to a deepening division among Black African states on the southern Africa issue. It also is adversely affecting Black Africa's relations with the West generally, as well as Black African popular attitudes toward the West. Beyond this it is difficult to foresee what the consequences will be. It seems unlikely that altered Western policies of the sort now contemplated by the Heath government toward the White minority regimes will cause any drastic re-orientation of the Black states' official foreign relations, even though several may take the symbolic step of leaving the Commonwealth. Most of the ruling groups in these states are, themselves "Western" in outlook and training, and they are accustomed to living and working with the web of commercial, financial, educational, and other relationships that link them to Europe. In addition few, if any, of Africa's leaders harbor any illusions about the prospects for weakening or eliminating the White minority-run states or about the chances of preventing the resumption and growth of Western economic and financial interests in those areas. Therefore the most likely response for Black Africa would seem to be a recognition of these realities; a gradual

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reduction in support to the guerrillas; and a decision to do nothing more about the southern Africa question than give it suitably strident propaganda in the OAU and UN.

18. But nations sometimes find good reason to act in ways that may appear more emotional than prudent; and Black African countries surely are no less prone than others to adopt policies based on notions of national or personal prestige, racial sympathies, or some other objective which conflicts with what would seem to be in their own best interests. What, then, might be the more extreme responses -- particularly on the part of one or two of the more radical Black African nations? One conceivable reaction might be a decision to sustain, or even increase, support to the guerrilla movements and to prepare for the inevitable reprisals by seeking large quantities of surface-to-air missiles and other modern weapons and training from the USSR or Communist China. To date Tanzania and Somalia are the only African countries to turn exclusively to Communist countries for arms. In the case of Tanzania the quantities involved so far are very small -- probably less than \$30 million in value -- and include plans to supply a small number of vintage Mig fighter planes.

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Another more extreme response to the UK's action might be a flare-up in Black racist feelings against British and other Whites. Such feelings, fanned by anti-Western extremists, and exacerbated by other setbacks in southern Africa, could well force some leaders to take a stronger line against the arms sales and perhaps to adopt measures against British and other Whites within their borders. This would be particularly likely where a national leader stands in need of a popular issue to stay in power. Moreover, a rising tide of hostile acts and propaganda directed toward the UK might then bring out barely concealed racist feelings among a substantial part of the British electorate. This, in turn, would give leverage to the outspoken White racist wing of the Conservative Party, so that the Heath government might find it politically difficult to make any conciliatory gestures toward Black Africa.

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